

# AT A WAR CEMETERY TRACES AND PRACTICES OF COMMEMORATION

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*This article discusses war cemeteries from the First World War located near Łódź, Poland. From among approximately two hundred such cemeteries, I have selected a few, all of them established after the Battle of Łódź in 1914, to serve as an example for describing others as well. I view a First World War cemetery as a space that retains traces of human activity, and I describe past and present actions intended to commemorate the fallen soldiers and to sacralize the past. Architectural elements and human actions comprise a document that reports on reality; they are materials that produce a narrative about the present and constitute evidence of patterns in modes of acting and thinking that are present in culture.*

Keywords: war cemetery, trace, practices of commemoration, First World War, Battle of Łódź, environs of Łódź

*Avtorica v članku obravnava vojaška pokopališča v bližini Lodža na Poljskem, nastala v prvi svetovni vojni. Med dvesto pokopališči je izbrala tista iz leta 1914 po bitki pri Lodžu kot primer, s katerim ponazarja tudi poznejša. V pokopališčih prve svetovne vojne vidi prostore, ki razkrivajo sledove človeške dejavnosti. Ob tem opisuje pretekle in sedanje aktivnosti, s katerimi ohranjajo spomin na padle vojake in sakralizirajo preteklost. Arhitekturni elementi in človeške aktivnosti so vtikani v te priče preteklosti, ki poročajo o nekdanji resničnosti. So gradiva, ki ustvarjajo pripovedi o sedanjosti in dokaze o vzorcih v načinih delovanja in razmišljanja.*

Ključne besede: vojaško pokopališče, sled, komemorativne prakse, prva svetovna vojna, bitka pri Lodžu, Lodž

## WAR CEMETERIES

A cemetery is a clearly delineated place where a community buries its deceased members in keeping with accepted religious, ethnic, and social principles and customary practices. From the semiotic and cultural point of view, every cemetery may be assumed to be a text of culture. According to Jacek Kolbuszewski, it is “a set of signs that are organized on the basis of a directive—or rather a set of directives—and are typical to the phenomenon of the culture of death (or to its local, ethnic, or denominational subculture).” This set of signs “is produced, on the basis of an *a priori* assumption, solely by external elements, which create the cemetery’s infrastructure and which are unconcealed, perceptible, and intentionally exposed. It is owing to these signs that the given space is identified—first as a cemetery, and then more specifically in terms of denomination and ethnicity, as well as in social, cultural, and, of course, chronological and historical categories” (Kolbuszewski 1994).

This article focuses on a very particular type of cemetery: war cemeteries, or necropolises associated with a concrete episode of the conflict. These are sites designated for burying soldiers that fell on the battlefield or that died of wounds incurred during fighting, regardless of their nationality or denomination. A war cemetery is an enclosed area where no new interments are carried out; it belongs to the past and constitutes its representation.

## WAR CEMETERIES NEAR ŁÓDŹ

My focus here is war cemeteries from the First World War near Łódź. Because selected examples of such cemeteries may serve to describe all others, I discuss only a few of the approximately two hundred such cemeteries in the Łódź Voivodeship. My concern is only those cemeteries where there lie soldiers killed during fighting between the Russian and German armies near Łódź from November 11th to December 6th, 1914. This battle was the largest operation conducted on the eastern front in the entire course of the Great War. Polish historians tend to refer to this episode as the Battle of Łódź or the Łódź Operation. It involved approximately one million soldiers, over two hundred thousand of whom were killed. Among the fallen were Polish conscripts that belonged to the armies of the countries that had partitioned Poland and thus found themselves on opposing sides. As a result of the battle, the city of Łódź and its environs were in the German occupation zone; consequently, the burials were organized by the German authorities in keeping with the standards in use in all German territory (cf. Karczewska 2013).

The First World War left a legacy of thousands of graves, often with very limited labels and marked with makeshift crosses. They were scattered in the combat areas: across fields and meadows, including inaccessible gullies, gorges, and forests. The need to set these vast battlefields in order was very pressing, first and foremost for sanitary reasons. For this reason, administrative directives issued by the occupation authorities regulated battlefield burials even while warfare was still ongoing, from 1915 to 1918. As a result, new war cemeteries with characteristic wartime cemeterial architecture were established all over Europe.

The choice of location for a war cemetery was always determined by the location of the battle, and its shape was determined by the lay of the land. The features of the landscape were made use of, including hills, forests, and lakeshores. Thus, two thousand soldiers, mostly serving in the German army, were buried across more than forty-eight hectares on a hill in the village of Gadka Stara near Łódź. In the interwar period, bodies of German soldiers that died in the city's hospitals during the First World War were moved there from other war cemeteries, and in September 1939 the Germans buried nine Wehrmacht soldiers in the southeastern section of the cemetery. After the Second World War, German soldiers executed by the Russians were buried in an anonymous mass grave (Daszyński 2011). Examples of cemeteries located in the forests near Łódź include the Wiańczyń Dolny cemetery (about two thousand soldiers that fell in various battles of the Great War are buried in a one-hectare plot), the Poćwiardówka cemetery (over one hectare, unknown number of dead) and the cemetery in Witkowiec-Pustułka (over three hectares, about four thousand dead; Gosik 2004).

## THE TRACES

I perceive a First World War cemetery as a space that retains traces of human activity referring, as Barbara Skarga (2002) put it, “to what used to exist but no longer does, at least not here and now,” because it constitutes a sign of “a phenomenon from the past, of a thing that had happened and, although it is now gone, has left its more or less clear mark.” Such a cemetery is a particle of a long-gone world and thus requires an anthropologist to decipher the language of the material sphere of a past culture. Neither oral nor written, this language nevertheless conceals structures that point to the models and schemata of thought and action that exist in culture. In addition, I consider a war cemetery to be a cultural object that participates in a dialogue between the past and the present. According to Skarga, the concept of a “trace” does not delineate an unequivocal temporal structure and may point to the past and the future, as well as to the present:

At times, . . . a trace makes it necessary to follow . . . some nearby thing, a course of some action, an event, a situation; in a word, something that is present now. . . . It may point to the past, the future, even eternity; but it always leads from non-existence towards the present universe because it is being deciphered now. (Skarga 2002)

Guided by this observation, I use the traces visible at First World War cemeteries to seek the present in the past and to discover the past in the present. I am interested in the degree to which the present is only that: a *present* time. I decipher the testimony conveyed by culture (i.e., by an abstract cultural subject) and which permits an anthropological interpretation of it. I look at the traces of what Urszula Oettingen (1988) called the “war-time cemeterial architecture” at various war necropolises, bearing in mind that images of the past are constructed on the basis of material remains that were, after all, produced as a result of various strategies of representation implemented in the past (Winter 2013). Moreover, as Paul Connerton (1989) remarked, human activity encompasses both actions (cultural practices) and the representations of actions (memorials and graves). I present these representations from postcards and old photographs of First World War cemeteries in Łódź. It is useful to recall that one of the features of photography discovered by Roland Barthes (1980) is the “noema of photography”: the message “this is the way it has been” that it conveys. This is also the essence of photography because often a photograph upholds the existence of something that no longer exists. From the point of view of contemporary practice, photographs are not only a source of knowledge about past reality, but also a record of how the world was conceptualized and what the relations between human beings, space, time, and their perceptions used to be.

Barbara Skarga suggests that, in order to understand the past, one needs to

turn to the trace that lies before us because the past is not given directly. It is from the presence that the past is inferred . . . . The ability to understand the world and to decipher its codes—to decipher even more, perhaps—is imparted only through what is present. . . . [The past] has left behind it traces of its convoluted paths, its catastrophes, crises, breakdowns, powers, advances, and returns . . . , so all that exists now bears an imprint of past events. (Skarga 2002)

This means that all that exists now is a consolidation of various planes of time and that “what we are given to calling a homogenous and self-enclosed contemporariness has, in reality, the nature of a palimpsest” (Czaja 2004). Seeing a war cemetery from this perspective makes it possible to notice that its space consists of traces that have diverse provenances and are responsible for various connotations. The following is a brief presentation of this (for more on this topic, see Karpińska 2014).

## THE GRAVES

The infrastructure of every cemetery consists of external elements that are unconcealed, perceptible, and intentionally exposed. As a result, a cemetery is a set of graves that cause a physical space to be identified as a cemetery; they are also carriers of all of the meanings expressed by a cemetery (Kolbuszewski 1994).

The German and Russian soldiers in the war cemeteries created after the Battle of Łódź are interred in both mass graves and individual graves. Old photos show mounds marked with stones or crosses made of wood or concrete. Today, the mounds are no longer visible, and the burial is indicated by a stone or a concrete slab. Many of them bear only information (in Latin or Cyrillic script) indicating the nationality—“German” or “Russian”—and the date of death. For soldiers that were identified, individual markers specify not only the full name, but also the rank, date of death, and sometimes the unit that the soldier belonged to. This is written in German or Russian, depending on the nationality.

The layout of the graves at the Gadka Stara cemetery indicates that the instructions of the German forces to arrange graves in rows was not followed. Soldiers killed during the fighting on the hill were buried near the spot where they died, as indicated by the fact that arrangement of graves corresponds to the successive phases of the attack (Daszyński 2011).

Cemeteries located in forests are more orderly: the Germans are buried on one side, and the Russians on the other. The layout of the Pustułka cemetery in Witkowiec is still meaningful: the Russians were buried on the east side of the cemetery, and the Germans on its west side. In Wiańczyń Dolny the arrangement of the graves also indicates that the cemetery was divided into two sections, German and Russian, along an east-west axis. On either side, sections with the graves of officers and NCOs are located close to the entrance

(on the Russian side, this area also contains privates' graves). They are distinguished by large stones with carved inscriptions. Ordinary soldiers lie in the farther section of the cemetery. Their graves are marked by rows of identical rectangular concrete slabs. Their number, arrangement, and order are overwhelming because they show that a massacre occurred and that many men lost their lives at the same time. Covered with soil and overgrown with moss, with faded inscriptions, these graves illustrate the equality of men in the face of God, life, and death.

Old photographs of the Gadka Stara cemetery show that the first burials were marked only with simple white-painted crosses. The graves of the Russian soldiers were marked with simplified Orthodox crosses: they do not have the *titulus* (the uppermost, short crossbeam), but only the *suppedaneum* (the lowest, slanting crossbeam). Later, the wooden crosses were replaced with stones bearing inscriptions in black paint, and still later some of these were replaced with concrete plaques.

During the Second World War, nine Wehrmacht soldiers that were killed in the vicinity in September 1939 were buried at the Gadka Stara cemetery. Today, this is indicated by an inscription on a large boulder. A photograph of the grave taken shortly after the burial shows that it was originally a mound surrounded by stones, marked with a birch cross bearing an inscription and a swastika, and that the helmet of one of the fallen men had been placed at the foot of the cross (Daszyński 2011).

## THE COMMEMORATIVE MONUMENT

The focal point of the wartime cemetery architecture established under German influence (Mosse 1990) is a commemorative monument of stone or brick. In Gadka Stara, a wide avenue (today so overgrown with trees that it has turned into a forest path) led to a commemorative monument erected in 1915 at the top of a fifteen-meter hill. The monument was built of fieldstones and topped with a tall cross that was visible from afar and dominated over the area for many years. On both its sides, to the north and south along the ridge of the hill, several concrete plinths were erected, bearing the names and numbers of military units that had participated in the battle. In Wiączyń Dolny, two avenues (today, forest paths) led to two stone plinths that supported monumental crosses: a Latin one on the German side and an Orthodox one on the Russian side. The inscriptions on the plinths state that the crosses were erected after the war and were funded by Karol Scheibler, a Łódź industrial magnate. They dominated over the area, introducing a heroic note into the somber atmosphere of the necropolis. The arrangement at the Witkowiec-Pustułka cemetery is similar: in the western part of the cemetery, where the Germans are buried, there is a monument commemorating the German soldiers, and in the eastern part, in the center of the Russian section, there is a monument with an Orthodox cross.



Figures 1 and 2: War cemetery – 1914, Gadka Stara. 2012. Photo by G.E. Karpińska.

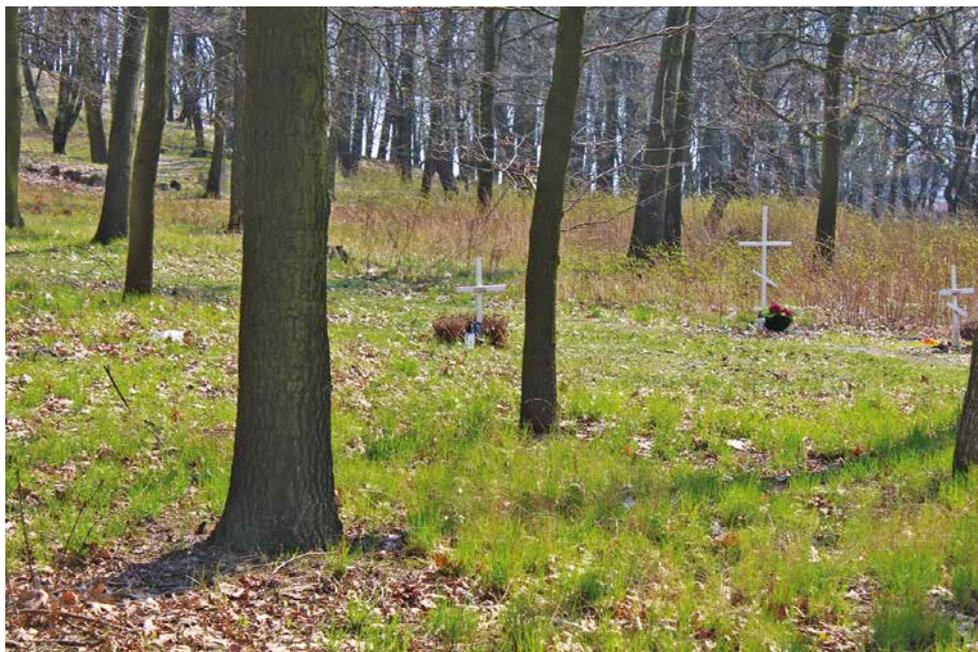


Figure 3: War cemetery – 1914, Gadka Stara. 2016. Photo by G.E. Karpińska.



Figure 4: War cemetery – 1914, Gadka Stara. 2012. Photo by G.E. Karpińska.

The symbol most frequently featured at Christian cemeteries in Poland is the cross; it is an autotelic symbol of death to both believers and nonbelievers. Urszula Oettingen (1988) observes that grave markers and their forms may have served primarily as the indicators of the military allegiance of the fallen. Carla P epina (2007) is of the opinion that a cross that crowns the plinth of the central commemorative monument at a First World War cemetery is not associated with Christianity at all, even though the majority of soldiers were Christians; her hypothesis is that the huge cross was a reference point of a kind, just as a flag used to be on the battlefields of the distant past. Its location informed the soldiers about the current battle orders and the way the circumstances unfolded (P epina 2007). It may also be assumed that a cross placed in the context of a war cemetery carried the message of the soldiers' brotherhood in the face of death, and also served as a symbol of the soldiers' heroism (in the case of the Gadka Stara cemetery, this is the heroism of the German soldiers).

#### THE CHAPELS

Large cemetery complexes had chapels where military funerals were carried out (Oettingen 1988). Photographs of the Gadka Stara cemetery from the interwar period show two chapels, today no longer in existence: a Protestant one, built in 1915 in the northern section of the cemetery, and an Orthodox one, built in 1925 in the southern section, near the first graves of the Russian soldiers. The Protestant chapel burned down after it was struck by lightning during the Second World War, and the neglected Orthodox chapel deteriorated in the 1950s; today only its foundations are visible.

#### COMMEMORATIVE PRACTICES

War cemeteries are structures that materialize the representation of memory. A representation is an interpretative image of an event considered by a given group to be a component of its own cultural background, or an interpretation of an intention ascribed to the recalled past (Djebabla 2007). Memory belongs to a given community. As Barbara Skarga (2002) put it: "Human memory, both individual and social, is no more than the retaining of traces and the ability to recreate the past through those traces." Memory encompasses not only the traces of the past, but also current and future expectations. The concept of a "trace," referring to both the past and present, does not delineate an unequivocal temporal structure. Skarga (2002) emphasizes that any reconstruction based on traces is always imperfect. I therefore examine the scenery of war cemeteries to conjecturally decipher what the people that established them created to nourish future generations' memory, and also what they wished to convey concerning their own attitude toward the past.

Commemorative monuments, as the central elements of war cemeteries, represent the massacre that took place on the battlefield and they express the large extent of the losses.

Their simple forms were not only intended to underscore the extremely somber atmosphere of the cemetery and to express the tragic nature of the soldiers' death; they were also intended to refer to the sense of community in order to "gather and unite the given community in grieving for the fallen" (Djebabla 2007). Lech Nijakowski (2006) points out that another motive for erecting the monument was the desire to rationalize the war effort; to show that death on the field of battle is a heroic one that bestows eternal remembrance on the soldier. However, as pointed out by Mourad Djebabla (2007), such a monument is hardly neutral: "It is more than a work that commemorates the victims of the war; its stone, bronze and inscriptions are a focus for the emotions of a whole generation. . . . We find in it signs that point to the understanding of the sacrifice." It can therefore be assumed that these monuments are linked with a place and time; they are embedded in the concrete cultural and historical context. They were also produced by individual or collective authors, and they always reflect their authors' approach because they are created in an evaluative manner. In terms of symbolism, the monument ruled the space of the cemetery, as indicated by the fact that various commemorative practices were carried out in its vicinity; for example, homage was ceremonially paid to the victims and to ideas, speeches were given, ritual torches were lit, and so on (cf. Nijakowski 2006).

The commemorative monument at the Gadka Stara cemetery was consciously designed by the Germans occupying the city of Łódź to serve nationalist aims (cf. Winter 2014): to influence the content of what should be remembered in connection with or through this site, to underscore the components considered crucial, and, finally, to evoke desired visions of the future and thus justify the present. By introducing certain practices, the Germans turned the space of the cemetery into a remembrance framework, in which some memories banished others and enforced a dominant viewpoint. This objective is evident in the inscriptions placed by the Germans on both sides of the monument. On its western face, the monument bears a plaque with the words *Pro patria* 'For the Homeland', and on the eastern face there is a tablet saying *Hier ruhen in Gott 2000 tapfere Krieger* 'Two thousand brave warriors repose here in God'. At the same cemetery, opposite the commemorative monument, the shared fate of men that fell for their homeland is emphasized by the inscription on the gravestone of the nine Wehrmacht soldiers killed in September 1939: *Sie starben für Grossdeutschland am 8. September 1939* 'They died for Greater Germany on September 8th, 1939'. All of these inscriptions commemorate the heroism of the soldiers that are buried there, but one of them also refers to the national discourse, and the other to imperial discourse: their sacrifice was made for the homeland or Greater Germany; that is, the fallen men are united not only as brothers in arms, but also as members of the "national community," Greater Germany, for which they shed their blood. This message was further reinforced by the ornaments mounted in the openings of the fence surrounding the cemetery, which were shaped like the Iron Cross—first the Prussian, and later the German military decoration awarded for bravery in battle.



Figure 5: War cemetery – 1914, Gadka Stara. 2012. Photo by G.E. Karpińska.



Figure 6: War cemetery – 1914, Gadka Stara. 2016. Photo by G.E. Karpińska.



Figures 7 and 8: War cemetery – 1914, Gadka Stara. 2012. Photo by G.E. Karpińska.

The emphasis placed on the bravery of the German soldiers and their loyalty to their homeland brings to mind the ambiguous situation of soldiers of other nationalities, who, serving in opposing armies, were often forced to kill their compatriots. The soldiers killed in Poland—a country then partitioned between three countries—were Russians, Austrians, Hungarians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Germans, and Ukrainians, who often had only a hazy idea of who they were fighting for and for what reasons. Many gravestones bear Polish surnames: *Józef Skrzypczyk* (at the Wiączyń cemetery), *Deutsche Krieger Stachowiak, Korzonek, Kamiński, Wehrmann A. Janowski* (at the Witkowiec-Pustułka cemetery), and *Pte. Krawiec Stefan z Rybnika, ers. reservist Wl. Bajerowicz* (at the Gadka Stara cemetery).

The inscription on the monument in Gadka Stara strongly emphasizes the homeland: because soldiers gave their lives for it, it owes them homage and remembrance in return. During the Second World War, the Germans regarded the war cemetery in Gadka Stara as a place particularly fraught with ideological meaning, a “sacred center” revealing “the uniqueness of their nation’s ‘moral geography’” (Edensor 2002). It was an eminently suitable site for Nazi manifestations and celebrations that glorified the heroism of men that died for Germany and thus also extolled the glory of the German military. Members of the Nazi youth organizations were required to participate in these demonstrations. During the occupation, the Germans took care of the cemetery, tidied up the graves, and brought them back to their former state; in addition, it was renamed *Heldenfriedhof am Gräberberg* (Heroes’ Cemetery; Daszyński 2011). George L. Mosse (1990) highlights the result of these actions: “The memory of the war was refashioned into a sacred experience which provided the nation with a new depth of religious feeling, putting at its disposal ever-present saints and martyrs, places of worship, and a heritage to emulate.” These and similar actions by the Nazis were intended to legitimate their authority and military power and to intensify the process of the “militarization of social memory” (Nijakowski 2006). They were also intended to strengthen the bond of community between the Germans living in Łódź and those resettled there during the war, to reinforce their sense of belonging to a group, and to give direction to pent-up emotions. Hence, historical events mentioned at the graves of the fallen German soldiers were not only the Battle of Łódź itself, but also the fact that Germany controlled the Polish lands during almost four years of the Great War. In addition, during the Second World War the German occupation authorities promoted their own interpretation of the past and “reanimated” their own symbolic space. They stood guard over the territorial, spiritual, and cultural unity of the Third Reich, and they recreated and updated the national and political identity. In a country that expanded in 1939 to include the newly annexed Warthegau, which the Łódź region was part of, identity became a very particular value. It was pieced together from references to the past (e.g., as confirmed by the fact that Łódź was renamed Litzmannstadt in honor of General Karl Litzmann, commander of the 3rd Guard Infantry Division, which fought in the vicinity of Łódź in 1914), as well as from elements of Germanization carried out by the occupation forces and from propaganda aiming to prove that the city of Łódź and its region had been German for untold centuries (cf. Cygański 1965).

When a war cemetery is viewed from the perspective of the relationships between memory and space, it can be regarded metaphorically as a “memoryscape.” Kapralski, who introduced this concept to Polish scholarly discourse and whose reflections provided the basis for this analysis, emphasizes that the suffix *-scape* suggests the “fluidity of shape assumed by ‘landscape’, its perspectival nature.” A memoryscape is a tangible or symbolic area where “collective memory is embodied in the form of space” and which at present is a site of a “concentrated cultural practice.” The aim of this practice is “to impart order or meaning on the relationship between the past and the present to make it coherent, and to organize the difference (between ‘us’ and ‘them’, as well as among ‘us’) in such a manner that the existence of this difference does not threaten the symbolic domination or the related narratives concerning history/identity. This is because landscapes may contain many memories, some of which may be in a symbolic conflict in the same way as their bearers may have been, and still may be, in an actual conflict” (Kapralski 2010; see Appadurai 2013).

The soldiers buried in the cemeteries described here were killed in the Battle of Łódź. This battle was long forgotten by the Polish people; it was deliberately erased from memory. This has been commented upon by Michał Jagiełło (2011a):

The Germans lost the First World War and, after the Second World War, they preferred to erase their own victories from the first. The Russians left the First World War earlier because the Revolution had broken out in their country; later, to recall one’s military service under the tsar was to risk one’s own life. For this reason, battles fought before the Revolution were not mentionable either. Afterwards, during the Second World War, the Poles fought against the Germans, and after the victory of the communist regime—a victory in which the Soviet Union was a fraternal power—an attempt was made to decisively cut off the old history and to build a new one, . . . which began with 1945. This is why Polish historiography neglected some elements of Poland’s own history: elements that were considered politically incorrect.

From the Polish point of view, the Battle of Łódź was a battle between the Germans and the Russians, and thus between the powers that had partitioned Poland. Nobody was willing to remember that thousands of Poles had died wearing foreign uniforms. The fallen soldiers had been buried by the Germans, and so the Polish people considered the cemeteries to be German as well. In the process of creating the “new history,” the Polish authorities glorified the exploits of the Soviet Union, and the negative stereotype of a German was one of the elements upon which Polish patriotism was constructed. In effect, German culture as a whole was rejected as alien and hostile. The new vision of the history of Poland was gladly accepted by the majority of Polish society, which had been very sorely tried during the war; as a result, it was easy to make use of anti-German feelings because they were very strongly rooted in Polish awareness.

The local residents bestowed a new identity on the First World War cemeteries: they began to be associated with the Second World War and with the German invaders, and thus were treated as symbols of the Nazi occupation and German militarism. The cemetery in the village of Gałków near Łódź is a case in point. Even as late as the 1960s, the graves of the five hundred Russian soldiers buried there had concrete tombstones bearing their names. All of these tombstones were later stolen by the locals as perfect building material for the foundations of houses. All that remained was a boulder with the German inscription: *500 tapfere russische Krieger fanden in diesem Walde in Novbr. 1914 den Heldentod für ihr Vaterland* ‘Five hundred brave Russian soldiers met a heroic death for their homeland in this woods in November 1914’. None of the locals had the time to read this inscription carefully and the cemetery began to be called *Górka Hitlera* ‘Hitler’s Hill’ because the people were convinced the soldiers had belonged to Hitler’s army. Other war cemeteries were treated as a foreign element and were systematically ravaged; later, they were forgotten. Neglect allowed the forces of nature to play their part in the destruction. The state of affairs improved after 1989, when political and social transformations caused a sudden invigoration of social memory; closer links between memory and space were among the features of this shift.

The concept of memoryscapes assumes that their construction is a process that also continues in the present time, and that the social framework of memory is produced by many subjects that may not always cooperate, but always mark their presence in the given space by means of various practices. The scenery of the First World War cemeteries contains elements that have been created “now” and that constitute representations of memory that were inscribed on space, and then neglected and forgotten for many years, but were nevertheless authentic due to being inseparably linked with definite historical events (e.g., the Battle of Łódź). In this context, the memory associated with the history of this location as a battlefield is inscribed on the concrete, physical space of the cemetery. Memory associated with any battlefield is a difficult and ambiguous one: it is as much a place of defeat as a place of victory, and this is translated into the memory of the victor and the memory of the vanquished. The Battle of Łódź did not bring a decisive victory to either of the sides; strategically, it was the Germans that won because they blocked the Russian offensive on Berlin, whereas tactically the victory belonged to the Russians because they prevented their forces from being surrounded in Łódź (Jagiełło 2011b). In its aftermath, however, thousands of soldiers were buried on foreign soil, far from their homes, in a physical space that now belongs to neither of the combatants and is thus deprived of a guardian of memory.

The “new” elements at the First World War cemeteries result from the actions, much varying in their scope, undertaken in the last few years by local government institutions and local organizations in cooperation with German and Russians bodies, as well as the initiatives embarked on by private individuals with the aim of setting in order and restoring the war cemeteries and commemorating the fallen soldiers. The following are a few examples.

Members of Łódź Group Association for Exploration and Historical Research (*Stowarzyszenie Eksploracyjno-Historyczne "Grupa Łódź"*), established in 2007, look after the First World War cemeteries. In the fall of 2007, several dozen gravestones at the Poćwiardówka cemetery were cleared of moss and their inscriptions restored by soldiers of the Polish Army and the Berlin unit of the Bundeswehr. Stone and concrete memorial markers that the Bundeswehr uncovered and renovated in 2008 in 2009 are much in evidence in the Witkowice-Pustułka cemetery. Members of the Russia House (*Rossiyskiy Dom*) association in Warsaw, which unites the families of diplomats from Russian-speaking countries, have been coming to the cemetery since 2008. The Gańków cemetery is looked after by local residents.

At the foot of the commemorative monument at the Gadka Stara cemetery there is now a granite plaque with an inscription in Polish, German, and Russian: "Here lie the soldiers that fell in the war of 1914–1918. Sacred be their memory and that of the victims of all wars. Rzgów, 10 August 10th, 1998." Another plaque is mounted at the cemetery entrance, stating that it was renovated from 1994 to 1998 with the aid of young people from Poland and Germany. This cemetery is looked after by members of the Iron Eagle Association of History Reenactors (*Stowarzyszenie Rekonstruktorów Historycznych "Żelazny Orzeł"*), which, helped by students from local schools, conducts all the necessary work, clears the gravestones of moss, removes weeds, and lights grave lanterns.

On the grave immediately by the entrance to the Wiączyń cemetery, on the left (Russian) side, there is a large boulder similar to those that mark the graves of Russian and German soldiers buried there over a hundred years ago. It bears a prominent granite plaque with the inscription *Mogiła żołnierzy armii rosyjskiej poległych w Dąbrowie w 1914 roku* 'The grave of Russian Army soldiers killed at Dąbrowa in 1914'; burnt-out grave lanterns stand on the ground. Below lie the remains of ten Russian soldiers that fell in the Battle of Łódź; they were exhumed in the village of Dąbrowa (in the Municipality of Nowosolna) and were ceremonially buried at Wiączyń in the presence of the Catholic and Orthodox clergy and members of the local government in November 2006.

War cemeteries are also becoming tourist attractions; there are tourist routes linking First World War burial sites laid out by the local authorities near Łódź. Among other things, these initiatives are associated with the Memorial Trail laid out in the municipalities of Brzeziny, Dmosin, Rogów, Jeźów, and Koluszki as part of the project "A Museum in Space. Multicultural Roots of the Łódź Region." The roads leading to First World War cemeteries were marked out and signs were set up at the cemeteries with information about the fighting that took place in the area in late 1914 and about the men buried at the cemetery. The purpose of the information about the past is to reinforce the ceremonial character of the locations as associated with particular municipalities, to stimulate interest, and to turn the region into an important spot on the tourist map of central Poland. Laying out the Memorial Trail should be perceived as an action directed towards the practice of commemorating and sacralizing the past, and above all as an action legitimated by referring

to “grand” tradition: the battle fought in the vicinity and its consequences—that is, to history with a capital *H*.

Many First World War cemeteries located in these municipalities are a distinguishing feature of this part of the Łódź Voivodeship; they constitute a *signum loci* attesting to the area’s special character. This manner of referring to the local past is defined by Andrzej Szpociński (2010) as a “façade” memory. “Historical monuments or famous figures—because it is they that are the object of this type of memory—are treated as a *signum loci*, signs that make it possible to construct a unique image of a town or a region.” Scholars argue that sites such as cemeteries are so strongly marked ideologically that they may affect the sense of belonging (Edensor 2002); in addition, they constitute a heritage that incontrovertibly confirms one’s belonging to a place. It must be emphasized, however, that First World War cemeteries are not the heritage of the residents of these communities; they are resources of local history connected with a place. From the point of view of the group, they constitute what Tim Edensor termed “iconic sites”; that is, “highly selective, synecdochal features which are held to embody specific kinds of characteristics.” These features bring to mind or commemorate historical events and attest to the existence of past cultures (Edensor 2002). They are crucial as distinctive points of the landscape, which is “etched with the past, so that ‘history runs through geography’” (Edensor 2002). The residents of the municipalities of Koluszki, Brzeziny, Dmosin, Jeżów, and Rogów did not inherit this past from their ancestors, but, as put by Andrzej Szpociński (2010), who described this manner of referring to the local past, they “received it together with the area that contains its traces. Under these circumstances . . . a heritage detached from a group becomes, above all, a label, a trademark of the place.” War cemeteries constitute a text that is legible to the locals and, by virtue of being there “since time immemorial,” are treated by them as an element of tradition.

If one views the memoryscape as a palimpsest consisting of various culturally discrete and chronologically overlapping layers, then it is necessary to perceive these “new” elements as artefacts of contemporary culture that constitute a successive layer of the “wartime cemetery architecture.” Although today they serve as “memory implants” (Golka 2009), they also have the status of a trace attesting to the fact that someone has been *here*, at this very spot. They are a type of material that the narrative about the present consists of. They are also a testimony to the models and schemata of thought and action that exist in contemporary culture. They cannot be treated as a reality disconnected from the past because they are intertwined with it. In addition, they send a given section of history into public circulation and serve to adjust memory to current expectations. Treating these artefacts as traces, an anthropologist cannot analyze them as testimonies that, in terms of interpretation, are finished and closed, but instead must place them in the contexts of “possible meanings” in the universe of diverse cultures and cultural practices that together create the broad area of human reality. In conclusion, let us recall what Piotr Kowalski so strongly emphasized in his essay (2006):

The history of culture is the history of adding and accumulating meanings, and not a history of their rejection, destruction, or amnesia. The indelible palimpsest character of culture relies on upholding the memory about the existence of meanings other than the current ones. These meanings (the past contexts) can never be erased; the fact that some tradition, a tangible solution, a text, or meaning disappears for a period of years, centuries even, does not mean it is utterly eliminated. . . . The palimpsest character as a feature of texts and their creators' intention . . . means the necessity of searching for, uncovering, and revealing past messages, and thus constructing the interpretation of the contemporary world and human destiny. This is a very special type of approach to the past; in culture, in tradition, everything is concurrent, although the arrangements vary; there is also all that which is still increasing.

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## NA VOJAŠKEM POKOPALIŠČU: SLEDI IN PRAKSE KOMEMORACIJ

*Avtorica obravnava vojaška pokopališča v okolici Lodža (Poljska), nastala v prvi svetovni vojni. Te prostore vidi kot dragocen vir informacij, ki jih je treba dekodirati; v njih razvzplava dialog med preteklostjo in sedanjostjo, opazuje sledove arhitekture vojaških pokopališč in razglednice, ki so nastale v času vojne, med obema vojnama in času okupacije med drugo svetovno vojno.*

*Med približno dvesto pokopališči je avtorica izbrala pet (v vasicah Gadka Stara, Wiączyń Dolny, Witkowice, Poćwiardówka in Gątków Duży), ki na neki način kažejo na splošno komemorativno prakso. Raziskava se nanaša na pokopališča, kjer so pokopani vojaki, ki so umrli v bojih med rusko in nemško armado v bližini Lodža med 11. novembrom in 6. decembrom 1914. Boj, ki ga poljski zgodovinarji imenujejo bitka pri Lodžu, je bil največja operacija na vzhodni fronti v prvi svetovni vojni.*

*Na bojiščih umrle vojake bojiščih so pokopavali po standardih, ki so veljali za uso Nemčijo; med drugim so določali, da mora imeti vsako pokopališče zaprto pregrado, tj. suho kamnito steno ali leseno oz. žičnato ograjo; vrata z objavljenimi informacijami o značaju pokopališča (ime, datumi vojne, simboli); s centralnim pasom označeno kompozicijsko os; osrednji element v obliki spominskega spomenika, lesenega križa, obeliska, kamnitega kamna ali kapele; po izbiri lesene ali litoželezne ali cementne/kamnite plošče; napise na posamičnih in skupnih grobovih, zapisane v poveljevalnem jeziku; primerno zelenje, zlasti drevesa. Te značilnosti so opisane kot prostorske sledi človeške dejavnosti in se nanašajo na »kaj je bilo, vendar ni več«. Ti sledovi se razlikujejo po svojem izviru in izzivajo različne konotacije.*

*Avtorica razmišlja o pokrajini pokopališč prve svetovne vojne na način, ki omogoča spoznavanje konteksta: kaj so mislili ljudje, ki so jih postavili, in kaj od tega so sprejele poznejše generacije in skušale izraziti v svojih približevanjih preteklosti. Prav tako analizira stare in novejšje strukture arhitekture vojaških pokopališč in opisuje pretekla in sedanja komemorativna dejanja ter poskuse sakralizacije preteklosti. Na primeru pokopališča Gadka Stara je mogoče opisati odnos nemških okupacijskih oblasti do pokopališč prve svetovne vojne, spoznavati prakse med drugo svetovno vojno in ugotavljati nove identifikacije, ki so nastajale v obdobju Ljudske republike Poljske. Na pokopališčih se na točki življenjskega mejnika sedanjost sreča s preteklostjo, hkrati pa lahko v prostoru vidimo, kako so bili na eni strani pomniki uničeni, na drugi pa, kako za ta znamenja skrbijo različni akterji (organi lokalne skupnosti, združenja, ...); v obojem odsevajo nekdanje in aktualne komemorativne prakse.*

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